

# Power through your work commute on an electric bike

Are e-bikes the way forward for your daily slog to work? We meet an e-cycling convert and name the best bikes for your budget



Philip Dalton, who commutes into Bristol on his electric bike: 'It's a great way to start the day.' Photograph: Adrian Sherratt for the Guardian

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**W**hen it comes to commuting Philip Dalton has seen the light, or more precisely the electric light. The 44-year-old film producer from Lower Godney in Somerset is the latest convert to electric bikes, the two-wheeled commuting revolution storming across the UK.

Dalton verges on the evangelical when describing how, by ditching the car in favour of his electric bike (or e-bike as their devotees call them), he's transformed his daily 56-mile round-trip commute to Bristol. "I've got to get across the Mendips where there are some big hills to climb," he says. "The e-bike is brilliant as it helps me keep a good speed climbing up the hills, meaning that when I get to work I'm not exhausted. It's almost as fast as taking the

car, plus it's a great way to start the day. I love it.”

What exactly, then, is an e-bike? In essence it is a regular bike that has been pimped up by adding a battery, an electric motor and some hi-tech gadgetry on the handlebars. The motor kicks in automatically as soon as you start pedalling, although some models let you choose when the motor starts, and you can alter how much help you get. So when you're flagging and need some extra va-va-voom it's there in an instant, rather like you've just acquired Chris Hoy's legs.

But you can't just let the motor do all the hard work, as e-bikes are neither mini scooters nor mopeds. For e-bikes to be road legal in the UK the motor can only kick in once you start pedalling and will cut out once you hit 15mph. Yes, you'll be able to go faster by either pedalling like the clappers or freewheeling downhill, but the point is that this will be down to your own effort and not that of the motor. The battery will usually let you cycle anything from 10-100 miles depending on the model, and unlike electric cars if the worst does happen and you run out of juice you can still get home using pedal power.

Most batteries are detachable from the bike frame allowing you to recharge them via a regular plug socket, which can take around three to five hours. If you're signed up with a green electricity provider or generate your own power via solar panels, then running an e-bike is 100% sustainable and carbon free.

You don't need a licence to ride an e-bike or pass any kind of test, and you are not legally obliged to wear a helmet, though you would be wise to do so.

Of course many people take up cycling to get fitter, but given that you've got a motor to help you whizz up the steepest of hills, can an e-bike really help you shift those unwanted pounds? “Most definitely,” says Dalton. “You still need to make some effort on an e-bike, but you can manage the amount of help you get. If I'm not feeling that energetic then I can use more power, but if I'm up for it I can use less.



Philip Dalton: 'I don't have to waste time at the gym because I've had my workout getting to the office.' Photograph: Adrian Sherratt for the Guardian

“In the four months I’ve been using my e-bike I’ve got much fitter without really noticing it and don’t have to waste time at the gym because I’ve had my workout getting to the office.”

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A large black rectangular area with a small white square in the top right corner. Below it is a banner for a Dell laptop. On the left is the Dell logo. Next to it is a laptop with a Spider-Man graphic on the screen. To the right of the laptop is the text: 'DELL INSPIRON 15 7000 GAMING with 7th gen intel Core i7 processor'. Further right is the Intel logo with the text 'Intel inside @ extraordinary performance outside'. Below the laptop is a blue button with 'SEE MORE'. At the bottom left of the banner is small text: 'TM © 2017 MARVEL © 2017 CPII All Rights Reserved.' At the bottom right is the 'THE SPIDER-MAN Homecoming' logo.

The big difference between e-bikes and regular bikes, though, comes with the cost - as most decent e-bikes are priced at upwards of £1,000. “There’s a lot of cheap tat out there and e-

bikes under £1,000 just aren't worth it," says Chris Moody from the Electric Bike Sales shop in Bristol.

A smart way to ease the financial pain is to sign up to a cycle-to-work scheme, the government-backed initiative that can knock up to 40% off the cost of a new bike through salary sacrifice.

However, where these schemes hit a roadblock is that you are only allowed to spend up to £1,000, which rules out almost all e-bikes. To clear the way the Green Commute Initiative (GCI) has recently been launched, specifically targeting the e-bike market with a mission to help get more commuters out of their cars - thereby cutting air pollution and traffic congestion.

Unlike other cycle-to-work schemes there is no £1,000 cap, and the GCI has already signed up some big name organisations including Heathrow airport, Heathrow Express and the City of London. "Many people who try out e-bikes like them, but are put off because they think they're too expensive. The GCI makes e-bikes more affordable to more people," says Rob Howes, managing director at GCI, who also developed Halfords' cycle-to-work scheme.

So can an e-bike help you to save money on your commute? The good news is that with the battery costing less than 10p to recharge, plus an annual service charge of about £50, the financial benefits of e-bikes are compelling. "I'm on track for my e-bike to have paid for itself within four months, and after that I'm saving money compared with commuting in the car," says Dalton, who bought his e-bike through the GCI.

Howes, meanwhile, says that e-bikes can help transform the journey to work for countless commuters. "Our research suggests that 43% of commuters who aren't currently cycling to work don't because they are either not fit enough or need to arrive at work wearing a business suit and there are no facilities for a shower and change," he says. "The big plus for e-bikes is that you don't get hot and sweaty like you do on a regular bike. Plus at the end of a long day you can enjoy the ride home because you know you've got the back-up power from the battery."

Jason Torrance, policy director at Sustrans, the walking and cycling charity, agrees that the bikes have a big future. "E-bikes have the potential to transform cycling for many people including commuters," he says. "With leadership and urgent action from government, e-bikes could also tackle the public health emergency of poor air quality by making cycling a realistic travel choice for everyone."

Back in Somerset, Dalton has advice for anyone thinking of buying an e-bike. "You need to try an e-bike to really understand what it feels like and to appreciate its benefits," he says. "When you're out riding with the breeze blowing in your face it's wonderful to know that you're getting fitter, helping the environment and saving money. It feels like the future has already arrived."

### **Three on test**

There is a bewildering range of electric bikes out there, so if you are seriously thinking of buying one then you're best popping into your nearest specialist e-bike shop. Another good idea is to swot up about e-bikes before you visit the shop. Check out [pedelecs.co.uk](http://pedelecs.co.uk) for everything you need to know about e-bikes.

With help from [electricbikesales.co.uk](http://electricbikesales.co.uk) and [electricbikesguildford.com](http://electricbikesguildford.com), here are three of the best e-bikes for commuters priced at entry level, mid- and top range:

### Entry level



#### FreeGo Folder

**Price From £949**

**Battery range 30 miles**

**Pros** An established and reliable manufacturer, this is one of the bestselling folding e-bikes on the market.

**Cons** At 25kg it's not light, though lugging it will give you enviable biceps.

### Mid-range



#### Raleigh Captus

**Price From £1,750**

**Battery range 90 miles**

**Pros** With its top-notch battery and motor, the Captus is a hit with commuters who also like a spot of weekend off-road cycling action.

**Cons** If you're after a solid all-round town and country e-bike then there is not much to grumble about here.

## Top-range



### Scott E-Scale 730

**Price** From £2,799

**Battery range** 100 miles

**Pros** An outstanding e-mountain bike from a trusted name, it delivers serious oomph.

**Cons** You could find a cheaper e-mountain bike, but it wouldn't compare with the quality of a Scott.

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